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INDIA AND IMPERIAL PREFERENCE.

By

S. M. MITRA, M.R.A.S.,

Late Editor-Proprietor of the "Deccan Post" of India.



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NOTE

This paper, now slightly altered and enlarged, was read before a meeting of the East India Association, held at Caxton Hall, on the 15th March, 1907, over which the Right Hon. Lord Reay, G.C.S.I. presided. Of it, in its original form, Sir James Mackay, G.C.M.G., K.C.I.E., wrote: "I have read the enclosed paper ('India and the New Fiscal Scheme') by Mr. S. M. Mitra. It is concise, unexaggerated, economically correct as far as my humble judgment goes, and I agree with every one of his statements. I have never seen India's case so well or so simply and truly put. It would have given me great pleasure to preside at his meeting, but my position on the India Council prevents me from doing so. If possible, I shall attend the meeting."

2nd April, 1907.

SECRETARY,
Cobden Club.

INDIA AND IMPERIAL REFORM.

In the Fiscal controversy the position of India has hardly received any attention. The so-called leaders of Indian thought have not even discussed it. There is not a word in the "Omnibus Resolutions" of the Indian Congress about this most important subject, which affects the economic condition of 300,000,000 of the Indian people. A retired Anglo-Indian official, indeed, Sir Roper Lethbridge, K.C.I.E., Chairman of Devonshire Tariff Reform League, has just published a book entitled "India and Imperial Preference"; but a perusal of it reminds one of the old saying "when you have a very weak case, the best thing to do is to abuse your opponent's attorney." The book abounds with such choice expressions as "suicidal Cobdenite folly" (page 22), "silly free-fooders" (page 41); it refers to Free Traders as "timorous souls" (page 44), to Free Trade as "silly, antiquated bigotry" (page 49), and to Lord Curzon's famous despatch on India and the Preferential Tariff scheme as an "impotent document" (page 40), a "slovenly document" (page 70), and "pitifully mean" (page 69). Strong and unjustifiable language, though pleasing to the gallery, can never appeal to the thoughtful section of the British public. It is a pity that Sir Roper Lethbridge forgot that, in trying to champion the cause of his "Tariff Reform" party, he practically questioned the intelligence of the British nation, when he asked his readers to accept vituperation for stern commercial facts

Sir Roper Lethbridge claims (page 4) that his "arguments and conclusions, whether right or wrong, whether accurate or inaccurate, have, at any rate, been framed on strictly scientific lines that will be accepted as such by every trained and experienced economist." I confess I find it difficult to deal with "strictly scientific" inaccuracies! Sir Roper Lethbridge promises India everything except Old Age Pensions, which other Tariff Reformers promise for the United Kingdom. He says (page 3) "the idea of India imposing protection against Lancashire goods and other British-made commodities is an idle and mischievous dream" (page 61), "the Indians may rest assured that they will never get protection against Lancasure." Therefore he advises India to join in supporting the Imperial Preference scheme. This is how he translates his economic theories into practice. He suggests (page 68) Imperial Preference with regard to Indian wheat. He devotes several pages of his book to the question of Indian wheat supply; but he forgets that Indian wheat, without any preference whatsoever, has been very successful in the London market. In 1005 India exported to the United Kingdom wheat worth £7,882,078, or more than double that from Canada, viz., £3,065,941. In fact, India sends more wheat to the United Kingdom than all the selfgoverning Colonies put together. Surely Sir Roper Lethbridge, as an ardent Tariff Reformer, does not really mean that Indian wheat should altogether oust Canadian wheat from the United Kingdom! Leaving Sir Roper Lethbridge to his benevolent theories, let us try to face stern facts which stand in the way of so-called Tariff Reform.

Mr. Chamberlain's Preferential Tariff scheme

suggested no definite measures. The resolution passed at the Colonial Conference of 1902 was of an extremely general and indefinite character, hedged round, as Lord Curzon observed, with qualifications and provisos calculated to admit of almost any limitation, variation, or exception when applied in practice to the conditions of any particular colony. The proposed scheme can hardly be discussed until it is further developed. The Indian Tariff, with one or two unimportant exceptions, imposes duties purely for revenue purposes. The Indian Fiscal system is almost free from any protective intention. Only the countervailing sugar duties may be regarded as protective in a way. Sometimes India is forced to shape her policy, not in accordance with her interests, but according to the demands of other constituents of the Empire. But a line should be drawn somewhere. India is not quite fairly treated. The United Kingdom levies duties on India's tea, coffee, tobacco, and unrefined sugar. Her duty on Indian coffee is about 19 per cent. ad valorem, while on Indian tea it is as much as 90 per cent.! Her duty on Indian tobaccos is not ad valorem, but, being imposed according to weight, it operates severely on her tobacco, which is all of the cheaper varieties. If, in accordance with the general foreign system of tariffs, the United Kingdom were to impose a reasonable duty on synthetic indigo, as a chemical compound, while admitting natural indigo free, as a raw material, it would benefit India enormously. But it is a great pity that the British fiscal system, instead of being altered to benefit India, is in danger of being altered with the result of causing harm to poor India for the sake of the self-governing Colonies. Is it fair to sacrifice the interests of

300,000,000 loyal subjects in order to further the supposed interests of only 11,000,000 belonging to the self-governing Colonies? The people of these Colonies are, no doubt, of English extraction; at the same time, the 300,000,000 in India are not of savage tribes, but, as Lord Curzon said in his Guildhall speech in July, 1904, "of races with traditions and civilisations much older than that of England, with a history not inferior to England in dignity or romance." The Premiers who meet at the Colonial Conferences are, no doubt, men of great talents; yet they work-most naturally-only within their own limits. None of these Conferences have so far faced the subject of India in their Empire arrangement. Without India the Colonial Conferences, instead of being Imperial, were only Departmental organisations. Perhaps it was as inexpedient to ask those who had a prejudice against British Indian labour to concern themselves with the interests of India, as it would be unfair to compel India to give a preference to countries that have introduced legislation against their British Indian fellow subjects. Anyhow, poor India had no representative-official or non-official-in these Conferences, though their deliberations would indirectly, nevertheless enormously, affect the economic position of the 300,000,000 people belonging to the Empire. All India must, therefore, be grateful to the Liberal Government for appointing a representative to watch India's interest in the forthcoming Conference next month. The two Agenda papers of the forthcoming Colonial Conference have, unfortunately, not a word about India.

Unlike the self-governing Colonies, India does not say "Daughter am I in my mother's house, but mistress in my own." India is not a colony

clinging to the parent stem only till it reaches maturity and is capable of separate growth, but is like one of those dependent roots of the mighty banyan tree, which, as it grows and develops, adds to the strength and widens out the circumference of the parent tree. In other words, India is irrevocably bound up with Great Britain. India is her civic as well as economic asset. India's martial races serve in the Indian Army, her citizens pay their share of the cost of the Empire. They were soldiers of the Indian Army who recently, when India herself was distracted and weighed down by famine and plague, saved the colony of Natal from being overrun by Boers at the beginning of the South African campaign, rescued the Legations at Pekin, and recovered Somaliland from the Mullah. But, as Lord Curzon observed in his Guildhall speech already mentioned, in the happiness of England's insular detachment, or in the pride of racial expansion, the average Englishman forgets that the greatest constituents of the Empire in scale and in importance lie neither in these islands nor in the colonies, but in the Asiatic Dependency. Not only in population India represents three-fourths of the Empire, but she purchases nearly one-third of the total cotton goods produced by Lancashire. She federates with England on England's terms. While Great Britain receives no contribution in aid of Imperial defence from Canada, and very little from other self-governing Colonies, India pays over £100,000 per annum for the British Navy, and pays her share of the military expenditure of an Imperial character. India is very useful to the Empire in various ways. During the recent troubles in Africa and China, India supplied 21,000,000 rounds of ammunition and 114,000 projectiles and shells, 11,000

tents, 11,000 sets of saddlery, 315,000 helmets, 169,000 blankets, 290,000 pairs of boots, 42,000 tons of fodder and rations, and 940,000 garments of various descriptions, in addition to 11,600 horses, 6,700 mules and ponies, and 2,700 bullocks. Last, though not least, in 1902 India undertook to raise, for the Colonial Office, five native regiments for service in the Asiatic Colonies or possessions of Great Britain. Thus the union of Great Britain with India is so intimate that their relations with one another must necessarily leave their marks on both countries. India, therefore, cannot be overlooked as a factor in the solution of the fiscal problem. In consideration of the part played by India in the Imperial system, and the services rendered by India in time of England's trouble, it is only natural for India to expect England to hold the scales even between her colonies and her great Dependency.

TRADE WITH COLONIES AND INDIA.

Indians—the majority of them—are, no doubt, poor individually, but collectively their importance as a constituent element of the British Empire can hardly be disregarded. Though politically India, as a Dependency, occupies an inferior position to the self-governing Colonies, yet, from an economic point of view, Great Britain cannot make a change in her own fiscal policy without watching its effects, however indirect, upon India. Economically, India cannot be considered a negligible quantity, when the value of Great Britain's export to India is remembered. In 1903 it amounted to £37,359,016, including the value of stores shipped for the Indian Government (vide Annual Statement of the Trade of the United Kingdom, 1905. Cd. 3,022, page 368), which

is actually more than her exports to the self-governing Colonies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, put together. In that year Great Britain exported, in value:—

To Canada	
To Australia (including Tasmania) To New Zealand	. 16,144,438
	£33.618,405

Every year Great Britain is gaining more in her exports to India than in her exports to the self-governing Colonies. Let us take the last three years:—

	1903.	1904.	1905.	Increase.
To Canada	£11,112,577	£10,624,221	£11,909,244	£796,667
To Australia*	16,144,438	17,336,470	16,991,009	846,571
To New Zealand	6,361,390	6,315,090	6,425.793	64,403

Total ... £1,707,641

To Indiat... ... £37,359,016 £43,821,615 £47,373,677 £10,014,661

* Including Tasmania.

+ Including the value of stores for the Indian Government.

These figures, which are taken from the latest Blue-book already referred to, clearly show that, while Great Britain's exports to India in the last three years have increased by no less than £10,014,661, her exports to the three important self-governing Colonies put together have increased by only £1,707,641; or, in other words, Great Britain's export to India, in the last three years, has increased about six times her combined exports to the self-governing Colonies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. And what is more important, Great Britain's trade with India, as the Blue-book figures conclusively prove, unlike that with some of the important Colonies, has expanded steadily, continuously, and

satisfactorily. In the British Empire India, therefore, offers the best market for British goods.

Moreover the figures already quoted leave no room for doubt that India is dowered with immeasurable possibilities for the future expansion of Great Britain's trade. Besides, unless the teeming millions in India had implicit faith in the pure and lofty motives of Great Britain, and were thoroughly convinced that she continued to safeguard their interests, the 76,000 British troops garrisoned in India-a tiny speck of white foam upon a dark and thunderous ocean-would be utterly inadequate to keep India tranquil. If by any act of omission Great Britain unwittingly shakes the faith of her Indian subjects in her bona fides she would irretrievably damage the stupendous and stately edifice of the Indian Empire which British statesmanship has taken generations to build up. Mr. Morley, in his last Indian Budget speech in July, 1906, said, "India holds one of the three or four master keys of the strength of Great Britain. . . Of all the subjects which engage our attention—for example, in this Session, education, taxation, foreign relations, the Army, the Fleet, North Africa and South Africa-not one of them exceeds in moment and importance to this country the wisdom or unwisdom of the policy that is pursued in India." British policy, whether pursued in India or towards India at home or in the Colonies, must be far-sighted, statesmanlike, and impartial. As Mr. Winston Churchill pointed out in his speech at Manchester on the 19th of February, 1904, "the condition of India is of vast importance to Lancashire. That her markets should be free and her people prosperous and contented is absolutely vital to Lancashire trade." The poverty of the Indian

peasant, largely due to centuries of practical anarchy, is a stern fact which has to be recognised. The prosperity of India does not depend upon her productiveness alone. In a great measure it depends upon the relations of her productivity to the consuming markets in the Continent of Europe. This fact should be borne in mind, Mr. Chamberlain's fiscal scheme is avowedly aimed at the consolidation of the British Empire. The Empire consists of about 400,000,000 people, out of which number the 300,000,000 in India are, unlike the people of Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, not connected with Great Britain by ties of blood, or of speech, or of religious or social affinity. It is, therefore, most desirable that the fiscal tie between Great Britain and India should be most effective as the bond of Empire. Economic unity is essential to the unity of Defence. Mutual interests constitute the primary factors which bind individuals as well as nations. Ninety-five per cent. of the people in India are quite illiterate. Therefore politics do not, and cannot, enter into the ordinary life of the teeming millions of India; but commercial changes sooner or later touch the poorest Indian peasant, and are therefore a constant element of possible approach or divergence between British and Indian interests.

In Lord George Hamilton's telegram of the 7th August, 1903, the attention of the Government of India was directed to the resolution passed at the Conference of the Colonial Prime Ministers in 1902 in favour of preferential tariffs as between different members of the British Empire. Lord Curzon considered the subject from the point of view of Indian interests, and the Despatch of the Government of India, dated the 22nd of October, 1903 (cd. 1,931),

said, "it is more the interests of India to leave matters as they are than to embark on a new fiscal policy, etc." But if India, in her own interests, does not desire to participate in the preferential tariff scheme, can she remain quite aloof? Can she avoid being drawn into it? Would not the preferential tariff scheme affect her, even if she avoided direct

participation in it?

The permanent debt of India on which interest is payable in England is about £214,000,000 (vide Mr. Morley's Budget Speech, July, 1906). Her net external obligations are about £16,000,000 per annum (vide Lord Curzon's despatch No. 324, dated the 22nd October, 1903). The major part of this great charge, as has been so ably pointed out by Lord Curzon (cd. 1931), is payable in a currency different from that in which her revenues are collected. The only means consistent with India's power of discharging this obligation lie in the preservation of an equivalent excess of exports from India over imports into India. Thus India has to stimulate her exports in every way she can. With great difficulty Lord Curzon succeeded in making the Indian exchange steady. The stability of Indian finance now commands public confidence, and Indian rupee securities are now rising in value in the London market, and there is the nucleus of a reserve of gold. Now, if, owing to a change in Great Britain's fiscal policy, the balance of trade in India's favour should dwindle, her exchange will suffer, and the value of the rupee will again go down. Such a catastrophe to India would inevitably react on Great Britain, in consequence of the intimate relations of the two. It is, therefore, that the Conservative leader, Mr. Balfour, said in his speech delivered at the Scottish Conservative Club in October, 1904, that the best way to solve the fiscal question "is to have a free conference with the self-governing Colonies and India, which will determine whether an arrangement be possible or not." Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the author of the preferential tariff scheme, in his letter to me dated the 23rd March, 1906 (which was published in the Times of the 27th March, 1906), himself admitted the truth of this remark, for he said, "in reference to the possible position of India, if a conference on the subject of Tariff Reform is held, the views of India, as expressed by her representatives, ought, in his opinion, to have the same weight as if India were a self-governing Colony."

Trade between Germany and India.

To properly understand the position of India in the fiscal controversy, I must refer to the trade between Germany and India, which has during the last decade experienced a marked development; the total value of the annual exports from India to Germany having increased about 50 per cent., while the total value of the annual imports to India from Germany has increased 100 per cent. (vide German Trade with India, cd. 2,682-48). Germany now ranks third in importance amongst the various countries of the world, both in the value of the import and of the export trade of India. The total value of the imports to Germany from India in 1904 amounted to £14,745,000, and the total value of exports from Germany to India was £4,155,000. Germany takes direct from India annually about one-fifth of the aggregate Indian cotton crop. She also imports, in addition, Indian cotton viâ Great Britain. In 1904 Germany imported one-fifth of the total Indian raw

jute exports, one-sixth of the total quantity of seeds of all kinds, one-tenth of the total quantity of rice, and one-tenth of the total quantity of manganese exported from India. Besides these, she imports from India large quantities of pepper, wax, oil cake, sandal wood, black lead, tea, etc. The fortunes of India's imports from Great Britain are indissolubly united with those of India's exports. India is able to pay for imports from Great Britain by her exports to the Continent. India exports to foreign countries far more than she imports from them. Thus she, by her exports to foreign countries, obtains a credit balance of annually about £14,000,000, which becomes available towards the payment of what are called the annual Home Charges. It is the exchange of India's commerce by this triangular route that enables her to pay the annual interest due to the British holder of India Stock. The Empire, big as it is, is not big enough to consume all that India already produces of some commodities. In her trade relations with Germany, India is the gainer, as the figures given above clearly show. India's solvency to a great extent depends on the fact that Indian exports, to a value exceeding 38 million sterling, and approximating to one-half of the entire volume of India's export trade, are admitted free of duty into the consuming markets. India is an exporter almost entirely of food grains and raw materials. Foreign countries no doubt require raw materials for their manufacturing industries. But, as Lord Curzon pointed out so ably in his despatch already referred to, India does by no means enjoy an effective monopoly in food grains and raw materials. Her success in foreign markets is more due to the cheapness of her raw materials than to their quality or kind. The connection of Germany

and other foreign countries with the trade of India is an important factor in the proper solution of the new fiscal scheme. When Great Britain puts a tariff on German goods it is probable that Germany, through her tariff, will wreak vengeance on India in order to bring pressure to bear on Great Britain. Russia enhanced her already exorbitant duty on Indian tea as an answer to the passing of the Sugar Convention Bill in the Imperial Parliament. Russian duty on Indian tea is simply enormous, amounting to nearly 275 per cent. ad valorem. With reference to the first experiment in Tariff Reform—the Sugar Convention—the following questions and answers reproduced verbatim from Hansard, of 22nd March, 1906, will be found interesting.

"RUSSIAN DUTIES ON INDIAN AND CEYLON TEAS.

SIR SEYMOUR KING: I beg to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he is aware that Indian and Ceylon tea, shipped to Russian European ports, either direct or via United Kingdom, is subject to a differential duty of one penny per pound as against tea produced by other countries; and whether, seeing that recent telegrams give ground for supposing that the Russian Government contemplate still further imposts on British grown tea, and that orders for Indian and Ceylon tea have consequently been held back, pending further information on the subject, he will say whether any remonstrances have been addressed to the Russian Government; whether His Majesty's Government will use every effort to prevent this industry being thus handicapped in Russian markets.

SIR EDWARD GREY: The answer to the first

question is in the affirmative. I have no reason to suppose that the duty will be further increased. It is not proposed to make further representations to the Russian Government, as those made a few months ago led to no result.

SIR SEYMOUR KING: Will the Government consider the advisability of retaliating upon Russian oil?

SIR EDWARD GREY: These particular duties which the Russian Government have imposed are by way of retaliation for the prohibition of Russian sugar under the Sugar Convention. I do not think it will be desirable to carry the game of retaliation any further."

Again on the 10th April, 1906, the subject was pursued in the House of Commons.

"Russian Retaliatory Import Duties.

SIR SEYMOUR KING: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether, in view of the fact that the Russian Government has imposed extra duties on Indian and Ceylon teas, by way of retaliation for the prohibition of Russian sugar by Great Britain, under the Brussels Convention, he can state if Russia has retaliated in any way against any of the other nations which were parties to the Convention; and if not, why India, which was not a party to the Sugar Convention, should be singled out for vicarious punishment for Great Britain's action; and what steps His Majesty's Government propose to take for India's protection.

SIR EDWARD GREY: The reply to the first question is in the negative. With regard to the second, His Majesty's Government have not been informed of the reason why Russia retaliated upon India and

Ceylon and not upon the United Kingdom. With regard to the third, I would refer the hon member to the answer given to him on the 22nd ultimo."

In the face of such actual retaliation against India for the action of Great Britain, Sir Roper Lethbridge, in the book previously quoted, coolly takes the British public into his confidence and assures them (page 37) that the Protectionist Government "are not in the least likely to increase the duties on any Indian goods whatever simply out of pique, as some silly old women might do." One fact, however, is a better guide than fifty speculations.

A tariff discriminating against Russian petroleum, might, for a time, force Russia to lower her duty on Indian tea. But a tariff war in the long run ruins both parties. Russia's tariff war with Germany, which lasted from August, 1803, to March, 1894, taught both countries a lesson not to be easily forgotten. Trade between the two countries reached the lowest point it had touched for some years. The termination of hostilities by an agreement resulted in a renewal of growth of their mutual trade. The trade between the two countries increased both absolutely and in proportion to that with other countries. The exports of Russian food stuffs to Germany, and of German manufactures to Russia, increased about 200 per cent. A tariff war never pays. India has probably lost more by Russia's retaliation on her tea than the West Indian sugar industry has gained. It would be interesting to calculate what the net result of the Sugar Convention is—loss or gain to the Empire taken as a whole. As Mr. Winston Churchill observed in the House of Commons on the 29th July, 1903, in his speech on the Brussels Sugar Convention Bill, "every country

ought to be governed from some central point of view where all classes and all interests are proportionately represented." Is it sound statesmanship to introduce a measure which, however indirectly, takes out from the pockets of one class of British subjects in order to fill the pockets of another class of British subjects? The Sugar Convention has not benefited the West Indies effectually, but has made India suffer substantially. Poor India was apparently sacrificed in the supposed—not real—interest of the West Indies, with which Great Britain's trade, in 1905, amounted to only £1,967,165, as against £47,373,677 with India!

That any change in the fiscal condition of India is undesirable was held not only by Lord Curzon, but by two Secretaries of State on both sides of politics, Sir Henry Fowler and Lord George Hamilton; by three other ex-Viceroys, Lord Northbrook, Lord Ripon, and Lord Elgin; and at least two most prominent Governors, Lord Reay, late Governor of Bombay, and Sir M. E. Grant-Duff, late Governor of Madras.

England's possession of India constitutes unquestionably the greatest and most solemn trust ever placed in the hands of any nation since the creation of the world. Lord Randolph Churchill, in 1885, remarked that India was "the most truly bright and precious gem in the Crown of the King, the possession of which more than of all your other colonies or great possessions raises the reputation of these small islands above the level of the majority of nations and of states, and places them in a position of equality with, and possibly even superiority over, the greatest empires of ancient and modern times." Lord Curzon supported this view in his speech at the

Royal Societies Club on the 7th November, 1898: "India has always appeared to me to be the pivot and centre—I do not say the geographical, but the political and Imperial centre—of the British Empire.

There lies the true fulcrum of dominion, the real touchstone of our Imperial greatness or failure." At the recent Delhi Durbar, in his memorable speech, his lordship thus emphasised the point: "I think a principal condition of England's strength is the possession of the Indian Empire and the faithful attachment and service of His Majesty's Indian

people."

Honour and fair play alike forbid Great Britain to surrender India's interest to the Colonies. Empire is larger than race and nationality. It is with Indian labour that the colonists work the plantations of Demarara and Natal. Mr. Chamberlain's preferential tariff scheme is aimed at the competition of white continental labour with white British labour. In no distant future England will have to face the competition of cheaper yellow labour, worked by intelligent Japanese heads and industrious Chinese hands. But England's possession of India enables her to face even a contingency like this. In fact, England alone among the Western Powers need not dread competition with Asiatic cheap labour. When England realises her position properly and joins English white heads to Indian brown hands, British Imperial industries would enter upon an era of prosperity undreamt of yet. The political force and the moral grandeur of England will indisputably be increased by the association of India in all conferences which affect the fiscal policy of the Empire, and the demonstration of such real cohesion is sure to raise the British Empire in the estimation of the world.

Lord Curzon, who is by instinct and conviction a true Imperialist, pointed out in his fourth Budget Speech at Calcutta on the 26th of March, 1902, that India's services to the Empire "do not stop short at the loan of military resources and men. India is becoming a valuable nursery of public servants in every branch of administration, upon whom foreign governments as well as the British Empire show an increasing inclination to indent. We have over a dozen officers in the service of Siam, we have medical officers serving in Persia, Abyssinia, East Africa, and Straits Settlements. We have engineers in Egypt, Nigeria, Uganda, and China. We have Postal and Telegraph officers at the source of the Nile, on the Zambesi, and at the Cape."

In the name of 300,000,000 of my fellow countrymen, who have no voice in the fiscal policy of the Empire, I appeal to the British nation, to the conscience of a free and high-minded people, whose sense of justice is not limited by race or creed or colour, to see that in dealing with Imperial questions they do not ignore or forget the interests of their loyal fellow subjects in India. This is not a question of amending the constitution of the Government of India, or giving greater political power or more appointments to Indians: it is a question of fiscal policy affecting the lives and fortunes, the financial and domestic concerns of the whole population of that vast Dependency of the Crown.

S. M. MITRA.

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